

2: Persian and Central Asian Presence in Kashmir before the establishment of the Muslim Sultanate

A profuse literature has been written on Kashmir's contacts with Iran and Central Asia; but so far only a part of this fascinating story has been unfolded: the scholars have almost exclusively focused on medieval period, as if the history of Kashmir's contacts with Iran and Central Asia started only with the arrival of the famous Muslim *da'i* (missionary), Sayyid Sharaf al-Din Bulbul Shah around 1315. What is, therefore, little known is that Kashmir had very intimate relations with Iran and Central Asia since the hoary past. And it is this big gap which I intend to fill in this chapter with the help of little crumbs of information.

Outside of Africa, the presence of the Anatomically Modern Man is established around 1000.000 years ago in Palestine; but within South Asia there is good fossil evidence for him not earlier than 31,000 years ago in Sri Lanka. One can, therefore, assume that the modern human arrived in India, including Kashmir, through Iran.¹ The earliest evidence of Modern Man in Kashmir does not go beyond 18000 years before present as is shown by the finds of blade and burin industry unearthed from Sombur².

A major shift in the social evolution in the old world occurred with, what V. Gordon Childe called, the Neolithic Revolution, marked by the arrival of agriculture and pastoralism. In Kashmir the Neolithic period began from about

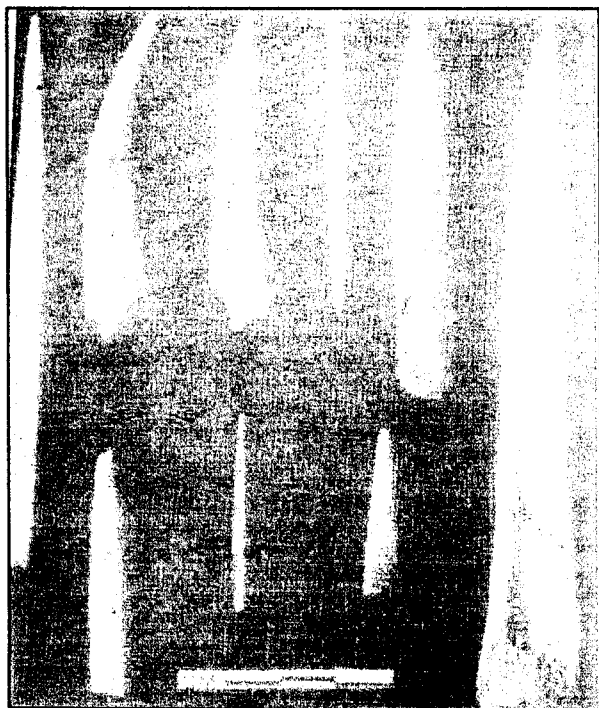
1 Vide Irfan Habib (ed.) *A Shared Heritage: The Growth of Civilizations in India and Iran*. P.X.

2 Shali. S.L, *History and Archaeology of Kashmir through the Ages*. P.57; D.P.Agarwal, "Foreword to G.M.Buth. (ed), *Central Asia and Western Himalyas-A Forgotten Link*, Jodhpur (India), 1986.

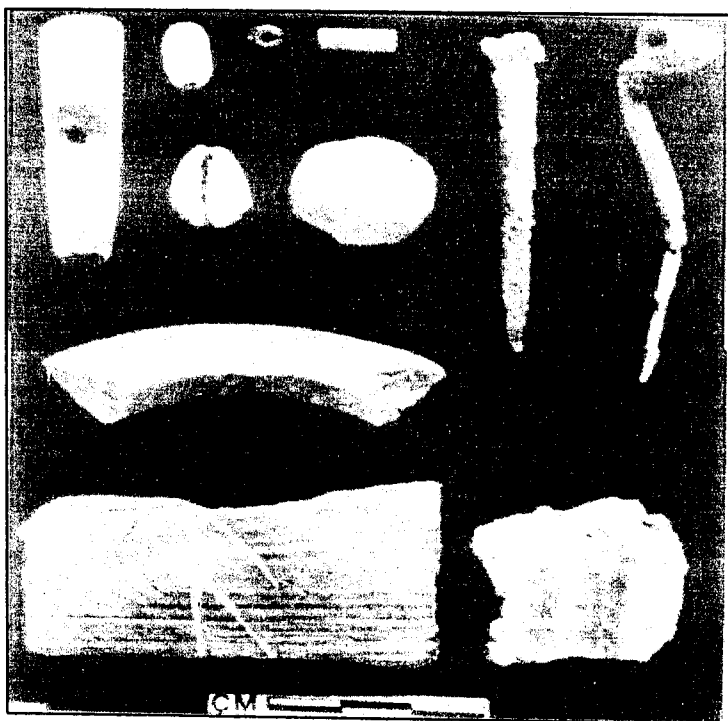
3000 B.C. The Neolithic culture of Kashmir is marked by some important features namely, dwelling pits, stone and bone tools, cultivation of wheat, barley lentil, peas, almond, peach, apricot, walnut and grapes, domestication of sheep, goat and cattle, painted floors, handmade and wheel thrown pottery, artistic activity and burial customs³. Parallels of these traits have been found in Iran and Central Asia; and these are much older than their age in Kashmir.

Dwelling pits have been found in China, Russia, Japan, Iraq and Iran since the upper Paleolithic times; floors decorated with ochre in Turkey, Iran, Turkmania and Baluchistan are datable to Paleolithic times; bone tools have been encountered from 7000 B.C onwards in Iran, Central Asia, China and Russia since 7000 B.C; the cultivation of wheat and barley originated in Iran wherefrom it traveled to different parts including Indian sub-continent; the cultivation of these crops dates back to the 7600 B.C. in Ali Kosh (Iran); almond, peach, apricot, walnut and grapes had their origin in western China, Central Asia and west Asia; the domestication of sheep and goat began in northern Iran around 6000 B.C; the use of potter's wheel was made in Sumer and Iran simultaneously a little before 3000 B.C. It is significant to mention that according to a renowned archaeologist, H.D. Sankalia, the motif of a wild goat with long curved horns, which the Burzahom wheel made red ware pot carries, has greater resemblance to the one from Hissar (Iran) than to the other from Sindh. The channel spouted vessel found from Gufkral has a long history in western Asia and Iran. The copper hair-pins discovered from Gufkral, originated in Aegean Anatolian region wherefrom they spread to north Persia and onwards to Indus including Kashmir. After Russia the largest number of painted burials have been reported from Iran. And as in Kashmir, we find in Khuzistan (Iran) dead being buried under the house floor, and the burials were both of primary and secondary types. While dog burial was common in China, goat burial has

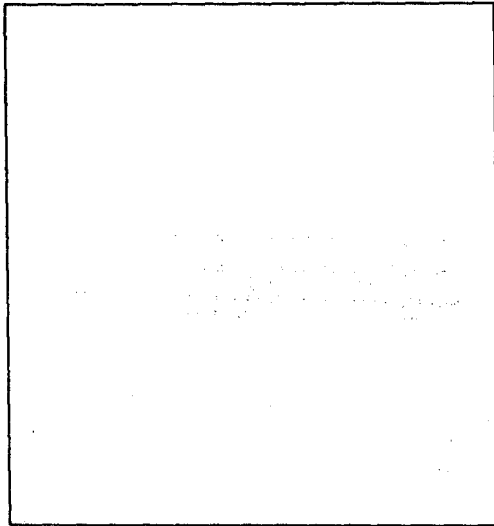
3 *Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1960-61, p.11; 1961-62, pp.17-21, 1979-80, pp.19-25.



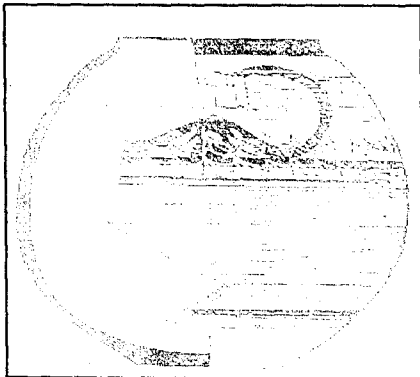
Bone tools Gufkral, district Srinagar
(*Courtesy R.C. Agrawal*)



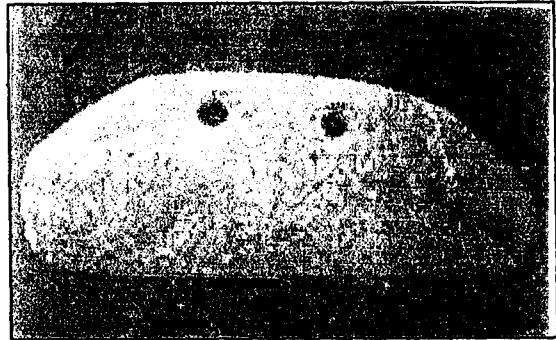
Antiquities from Gufkral, district Srinagar.
(*Courtesy R.C. Agrawal*)



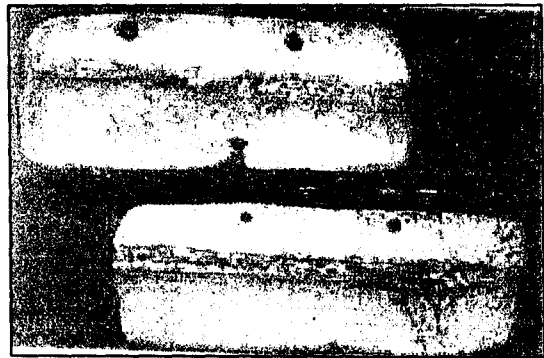
Kalako-deray, swat, stone holed sickles.
(Courtesy S. Asian Archaeology 1989)



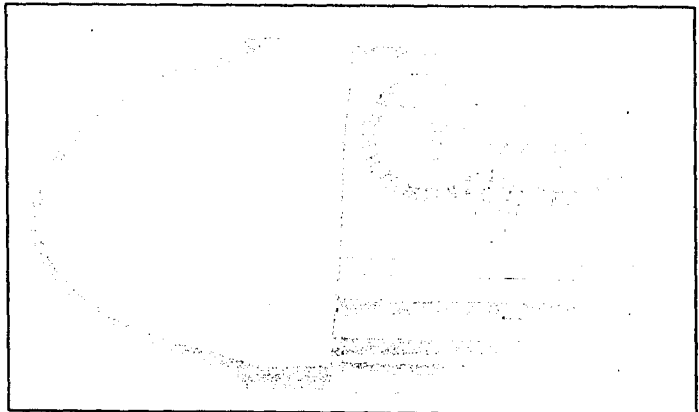
Pre-Harappan pot with painting in black from Burzahom excavations.
(Period II)
(Courtesy S.L. Shali)



Rectangular perforated stone harvester
from China,
(Courtesy S.L. Shali)



Bone harvester from Burzahom, district
Srinagar.
(Courtesy S.L. Shali)



Early Indus pottery, Kot Diji, I
(Courtesy B & R Allchin)

been found in Afghanistan. The rectangular or semi-lunar polished stone knife found at Burzahom has parallel in China and Swat. All these innovations made by the Iranians, Russians, Chinese or others traveled to Kashmir via Central Asia which borders Kashmir.⁴

Naga cult which is the earliest known belief of Kashmir transmitted to the west of Kashmir and from there to the Valley from Iran. Budda Prakash, the author of *Political and Social Movements in Ancient Punjab*, has traced deep rooted similarities of serpent symbology between pre-Aryan people living in the west of Kashmir and the people of Middle East – Akkadians and Persians, suggesting that they belonged to a common social and cultural stock.^{4a}

After the Neolithic period, there starts a new phase in Kashmir marked by menhirs, cist graves, iron, rice and millet cultivation, and rubble structures. The Megalithis have been found in lands bordering upon the Mediterranean and the Altante, in the Caucasus and in Iran.⁵ In the Indian sub-continent peninsular India was a hub of the Megalithic culture. However, in the context of Kashmir, the nearest most places where megaliths have been found are Baluchistan and Yasin and Chitral,⁶ suggesting that both Iran and Caucasus played an important role in the diffusion of Megalithic culture in Kashmir and its neighbourhood.

The nearest parallels of the Cist graves of Kashmir are found in Swat and in many neighbouring Valleys collectively called *Gandhara Grave Culture*. Tracing the origin of Gandhara Grave culture, the celebrated archaeologists, Allchins assert “The obvious comparisons for these objects and for the graves themselves are not be in India or Pakistan, but in Iran and the Caucasus.”⁷

4 This information has been borrowed from Aman Ashraf Wani, *Exogenous Influences in Kashmir From the Neolithic Times to the Advent of the Christian Era*, M.Phil dissertation, CCAS, Kashmir University, pp.51-98.

4a Ibid.

5 Philip Van Doren Stern, *Prehistoric Europe*, pp.247-58.

6 A.H. Dani, *History of the Northern Areas of Pakistan*. P.104.

7 F.R. Allchin and B.Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*, pp.239-40.

The immediate source of copper bronze culture of Kashmir was Swat and Gilgit. As the first ever copper-bronze culture evolved in Sumer in B.C 3500 and it was well established culture in Persia around B.C 2000,⁸ Iran was probably the big disseminator of Bronze Age in Indus and the border lands, though it had direct contacts with Mesopotamia making the metal common around B.C 3000.

The earliest known occurrence of iron used as a human artifact are from West Asia (North Syria and Iraq). Yet the Iron Age began not earlier than 1300 B.C. The evidence of the use of Iron in Iran is very crucial for the study of emergence of iron in Indian sub-continent. Iron Age started in Iran in 1300. And in India iron working began around 1000 B.C and became common around 800 B.C.⁹ For Kashmir the evidence of iron working in Gandhara region is very crucial as it was the immediate source of iron culture in Kashmir. Iron objects have been found in Gandhara graves assigning to the opening of the first millennium B.C.¹⁰ It is around the same period that we find iron in Kashmir.^{10a}

From 2000 B.C streams of Aryans penetrated in Iran and India including Kashmir.¹¹ As both Indo-Aryans and Indo-Iranians belonged to common heritage which they imposed upon the conquered people, it is easy to understand many common features of their beliefs and rituals, in name as well as in essence.

In 516 B.C Darius, the Achaemenian ruler of Iran, extended empire upto India by annexing Sind, North-West Frontier and the parts of Punjab. These territories continued to be a part of Iranian empire till Alexander's invasion in 326. We learn from the Greek sources that at the time of Iranian invasion. Kashmir was a part of Gandhara.¹² It is therefore quite probable that Kashmir too might have remained under the Achaemenians during their long rule of about two

8 Ibid, pp.311-12.

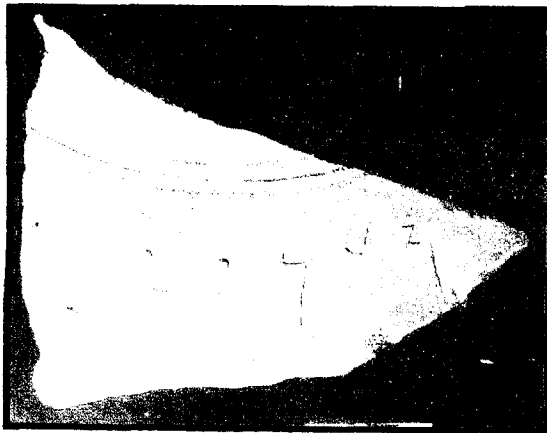
9 N.R.Banerjee, *Iron Age in India*, p.106.

10 Allchin, op.cit. pp.311-12.

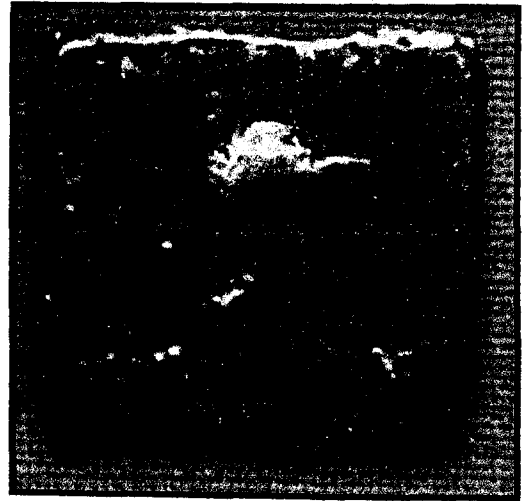
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11 *Indian Archaeology- A Review*, 1979-80.

12 Vide, Ray S.C, *Early History and Culture of Kashmir*



Inscription on a pot sherd from Semthan,
district Anantnag.
(Courtesy S.L. Shali)



Indo-Greek Coin, SPS Museum, Srinagar



Indo-Greek Coins, Semthan, district Anantnag
(Courtesy R.C. Agrawal)



Silver Coins of Menander 1st Century B.C
SPS Museum Srinagar.

hundred years over Gandhara and a part of Punjab, paving the way for Iranian influences in Kashmir, which received further impetus on account of Mauryan occupation of Kashmir as their polity, architecture, script, construction of royal roads and methods of propagating *dharma* bear deep imprints of Iranian influences.¹³

Around 180 B.C Kashmir came under the Bactrian Greeks.¹⁴ In the context of Iranian and Central Asian influences the rule of the Bactrian Greeks is significant in many ways. Having been thoroughly assimilated by Bactrian culture, they brought with them Zoroastrianism, an Iranian language called Bactrian and maintenance and development of irrigation- a thing cultivated by Zoroastrianism. Above all, they were the first to introduce the coins which can be definitely attributed to the kings. The custom of putting portraits of the rulers, their names and epithets, bilingual inscriptions, figures of the deities etc, all owe to them.^{14a}

In 75 B.C Kashmir came under the control of Sakas.¹⁵ The Saka was the name of a tribe, belonging to Andronovo culture, an ancient Iranian civilization.¹⁶ The area that borders present Chinese Central Asia on the one side and eastern Iran and Afghanistan on the other and falls within modern Kirgizia constituted the Saka country. The pressures from other powerful tribes forced them to flee and search for an empire elsewhere. They occupied Bactria around 135 B.C. They were again forced to flee and ultimately occupied south-western Afghanistan which came to be ultimately called after them as Sakistan (present Sistan). Thus the Sakas brought a culture with them which was an amalgam of many cultures which flourished in Central Asia and

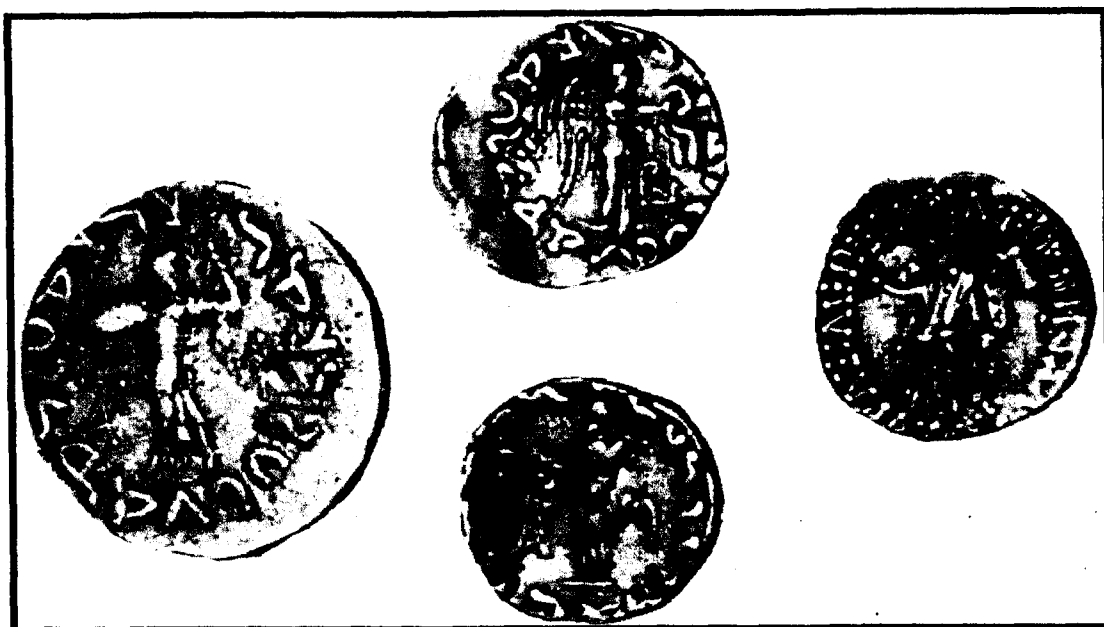
13 Saifur Rahman Dar, *Taxila*, pp.187-88.

14 For a detailed study of Indo-Greek presence in Kashmir, see Aman Ashraf Wani, *op.cit.*

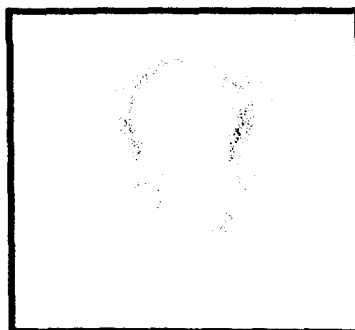
14a For details see Aman Ashraf Wani, *op.cit.*

15 Sakas are the first rulers of Kashmir whose coins have been found in largest number than any other rulers who ruled Kashmir until then.

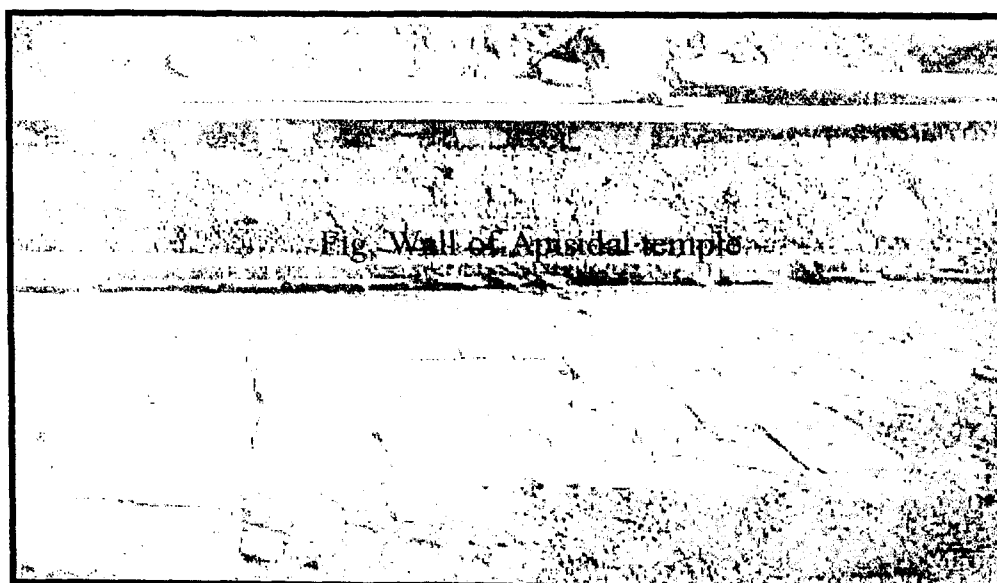
16 Burchard Brentjes, *Arms of the Sakas*, p.4.



Scythian Coins, *SPS Museum, Srinagar.*



Parthian Coin, *SPS Museum, Srinagar.*



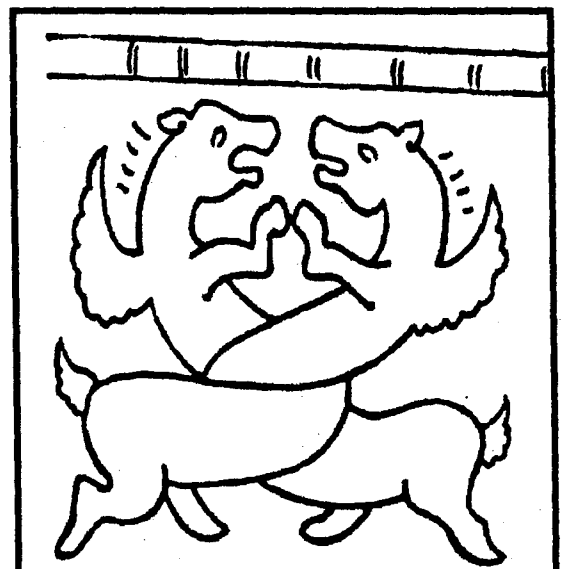
Wall of Apsidal Temple in Diaper pebble style with
portion of tile pavement Harwan.
(Courtesy R.C. Kak)



Parthian Short- motif on Harwan tile
(Courtesy R.C. Kak)



i, Tile stamped with a figure of intertwined lions,
Hoinar , Pahalgam, Kashmir.
(Courtesy Koul Deambi)



ii, Intertwined lions, Stone, Qatejh-I-Yazdigird,
Iran.
(Courtesy Koul Deambi)

Iran by then. Besides belonging to the Iranian race, they spoke a language which was related to the North Iranian group which includes Sogdian and Pahlavika (Parthian Pahalavi). That they spoke an Iranian language is borne out by the terms that appear in their inscriptions such as the name of their country 'Sakastan'. The suffix *Stan* proclaims the Sakas affinity to the Iranians. Their fondness for the Iranian word *kshetarapa* or *kshaharata* (ruler) further underlines the affinity. Harmatta has historically tried to reconstruct their dialects from words and names found in their inscriptions in India, and he points to its close links with the Khotanese Saka, which too was an Iranic language.¹⁷

Around A.D 20, an ethnic group belonging to the Parthians of Iran founded Indo-Parthian empire on the borders of Kashmir, spreading over a vast area including Kandhar, Seistan, Sindh, Gandhara and the Kabul Valley. That Kashmir formed a part of Parthian empire is evidenced by the presence of Parthian coins in Kashmir, Parthian place names and enormous impact of Parthian civilization on Kashmir. So far the coins of three Parthian rulers have been found in Kashmir. They are Gondaphares, Abdagases and Zeionenes. Besides there are many place- names which are related to either the Parthian rulers or Parthian cities or Parthian religion. For example, Gund (after Gondaphares, Gous (after Abdagases), Zewan (after Zeionenes), Dur (after the famous Parthian city Dura-Europos). Ash Muqam, Ash Pur, Ash Much (after the pre-eminent Zoroastrian goddess Asi), Hari Parbat, Harwan, Harwath (after the sacred Zoroastrian mountain Hara) etc. However, the most revealing information of the profound impact of Parthian civilization is presented by the Harwan ruins, particularly by the motifs stamped on their tiles. The over all plan of Harwan is informed by Parthian influence. The great Parthian fire temple at Surkh Kotal, is like Harwan a terraced structure with a courtyard

17 For details see, Irfan Habib, op.cit. p.XXII

surrounding the main temple and is located upon the highest level. Both Surkh Kotal and Harwan originally had a stairway leading through the centre of each terrace. The Harwan tiles are stamped with some well known Parthian motifs namely 'Parthian shot' and Parthian dress- leggings (trousers) and long skirts, diaphanous garments and prominent ear rings.¹⁸ The motifs like intertwined serpents and two winged lions locked in a fierce combat found in Liddar and Hoinar tiles have parallels in Parthian sites in Iran.¹⁹

That Zoroastrianism spread in Kashmir owing to the constant contacts with Iran is substantiated by the place names, beliefs and rituals which continue down to our times. Of the place names mention may be made of Mitar gom (the habitation of Mitar- the Iranian divine being), Mir (Mihr) Aur and Akhur (Ahura). Anich Dur (Anahita Durra), Hari Parbat or Harwan (after Hara) etc. Other significant examples of Zoroastrian presence in Kashmir are belief in water deities, the popular festival *frov* after the Avestan *frov* and the ritual of *roohan posh*.²⁰ Buddhism was also influenced by Zoroastrianism. The concept of Buddha Mitreya, the most famous of the Bodhisattvas who has messianic features is reminiscent of Soshyant, the Zoroastrian saviour.²¹ Sun worship was introduced in Kashmir by a group of Magians who accompanied the Saka invaders and were priests.

Around 65 A.D Kashmir was integrated with the Kushan empire which extended from Central Asia to Mathura. Kushans originally belonged to Kansu province situated in the present Chinese Turkistan. Under the pressure of the Huns they migrated west wards through modern Kirgizia and Tajakistan and ultimately settled at Bactria (Balkh, Afghanistan), making it their seat of power. The Kushan empire was founded by Kujula Kadphises and it was

18 Aman Ashraf Wani, op.cit.

19 Ibid.

20 Gulshan Majid, "The Frove:A Connecting Link between Zoroastrianism and Kashmir," in *The journal of Central Asian Studies*, vol. 7, 1996, p.62.

21 Ehsan Yarshater, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. III, Introduction, p. XXI.



4th Century Terracotta Fragment, Uskar



Tile depicting a man holding a spear,
Ahan, Kushan period.



Dancing Girl, Harwan, Kushan period

expanded by his illustrious successors namely Vima Tak [to], Vima Kadphises, Kanishka and others. As per the literary and numismatic evidence Kashmir was integrated with the Kushan empire by Kujula Kadphises himself,²² and it continued to be the part of Kushan empire till about 300 A.D. Kushan civilization was essentially a syncretic civilization in which besides the predominant Greco-Iranian elements we find the Chinese, Central Asian, Roman and Indian influences too.²³ The typical example of this syncretic civilization is the Kushan coinage where we find the different deities belonging to Greek, Roman, Iranian, Central Asian and Indian pantheons.²⁴ However, all these rulers were deeply influenced by Zoroastrianism even if some of them like Vasudeva showed more gravitation towards Saivism.

On account of the intimate contacts with the Kushans, Kashmiri culture was profoundly influenced by Iranian and Central Asia cultures in which, needless to repeat, Kushans were deeply rooted. This is more than clear from the figurative tiles recovered from the varied Kushan sites excavated so far. The tiles recovered from Harwan, Hoinar, Hutmur, Ahan, Kotabal and the Kushan remains found at Kanispura, Ushkur and other places not only show the extensive Kushan settlements in Kashmir but they also provide us a monumental evidence of the impact of their civilization on building technology, military technology, art and architecture, pottery, religious beliefs, economy, sources of entertainment, costumes, coiffure, diet and flora and fauna.²⁵ The archaeological evidence clearly points to the fact that, as elsewhere, in Kashmir too the Kushans brought a civilization which was an amalgam of many civilizations. No wonder, then, Percy Brown was startled to find Harwan tiles representing half a dozen ancient civilizations besides the other indigenous cultures.²⁶ The period is also

22 Hou – Han Shu

23 For details see B.N. Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of The Kushan Empire*.

24 Ibid, pp. 386-89.

25 For details see R. C. Kak, *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir*, Pls. XVI – XLII.

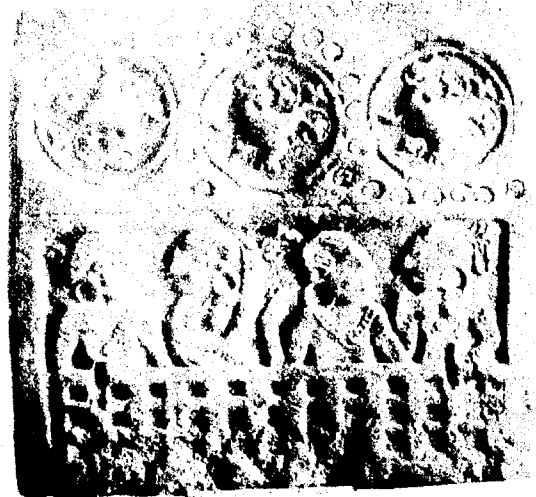
26 Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (Hindu and Buddhist Period)*, p. 155.



Tile with conversing couple and a deer, Harwan (*S.P.S. Museum*)



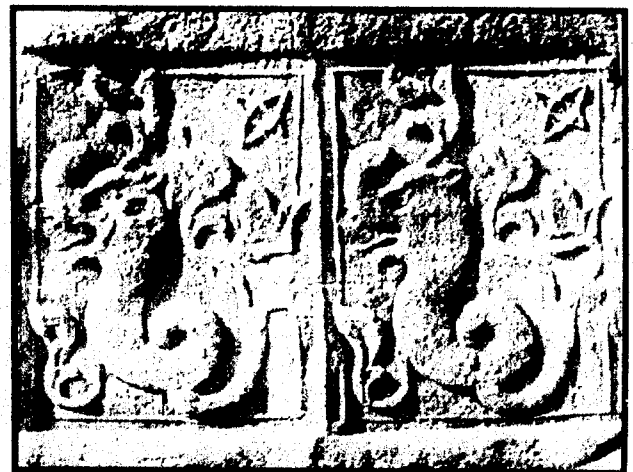
8. Tile with man carrying pots and a woman carrying a bowl, Harwan.
(S.P.S. Museum)



9. Above: A row of conventional cocks in medallions. Below: two pairs of men and women facing each other in a balcony, Harwan.
(S.P.S. Museum)



(a) Tile with aquatic motifs, Harwan.
(S.P.S. Museum)



9. (b) Dragon motif, Harwan. (S.P.S. Museum)

remembered for Kashmir having been chosen for holding the Fourth Buddhist Council under the patronage of Kanishka in which the Buddhist scholars from all over the neighbouring world participated and finally put a seal of legitimacy on Mahayana Buddhism.²⁷ Before concluding it would be important to mention here that at the time the Kushans entered Kashmir, their language was an Iranic one called Bactrian by modern historians. They used the Iranian title *Shaonano Shao* (Sassanian) *Shahan Shah* alongside Prakrit/ Sanskrit *maharaja rajatiraja* and Greek *Basileus Basileon*.

Towards the late 4th century Kushans were replaced by another Central Asian nomadic tribe known as Kidarites.²⁸ As they had close alliance with the Sassanians besides having occupied Khushano- Sassanian territories, the Kidarites were greatly exposed to Persian influences. This is well documented by their coinage and sculpture which bear their strong commitment to Zoroastrianism.

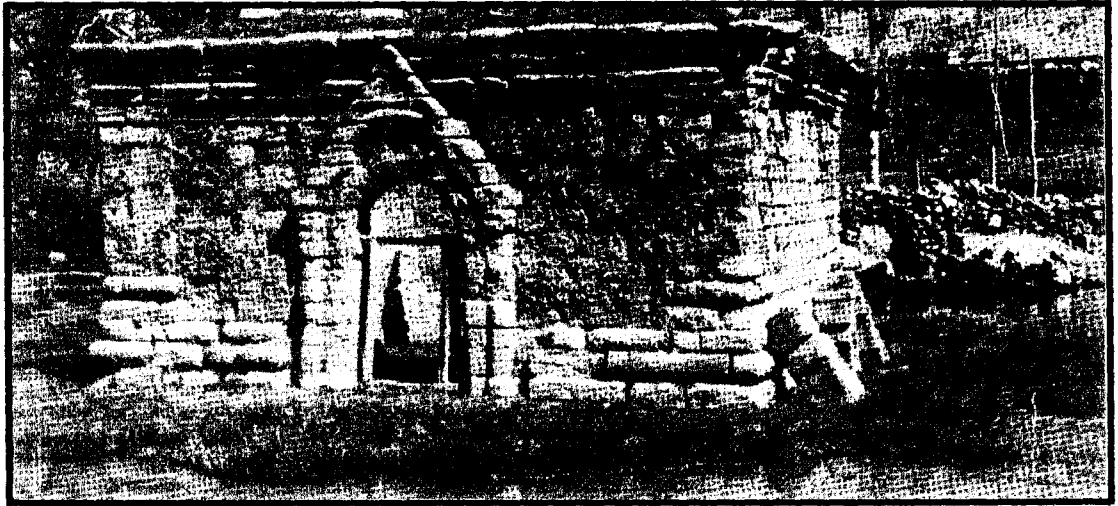
In around 530 A.D. Kashmir came under the occupation of Huns – one of the most powerful Central Asian nomadic tribes.²⁹ With a brief intermittent they ruled upto 620 A.D. The Hun occupation was followed by another wave of immigrations from Central Asia encouraged by the conquerors for accomplishing both the political as well as cultural conquest of the valley.³⁰ True, while remaining in the Indian environment for a pretty long time the Huns were thoroughly influenced by Indian religions, yet their homeland and its culture could not be completely extricated from their minds. This is evident from the interest they showed in shaping Kashmir after Central Asian technology and

27 *Si-Yu-Ki*, I. pp. XXXII, CIII, 117, 151, etc.

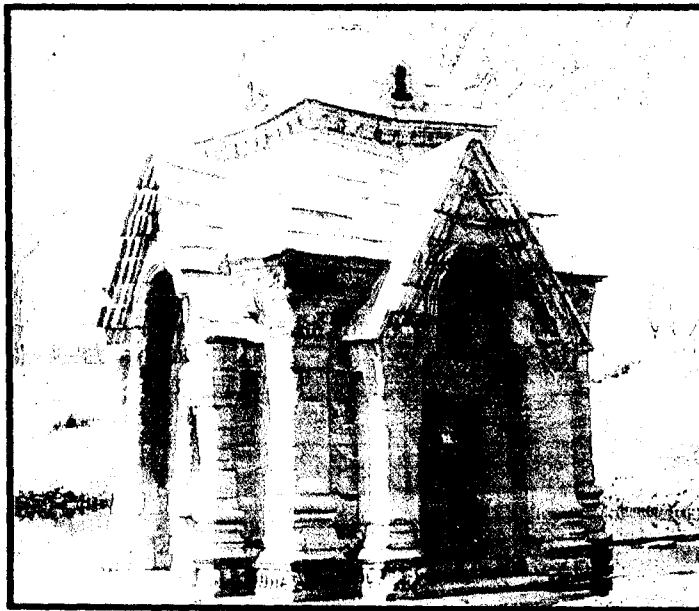
28 A large number of Kidara coins have been reported from Kashmir. As Kidarites ruled for a good deal of time, their coinage was imitated by the successive rulers of Kashmir, particularly the word Kidara became synonymus for currency.

29 *Rajatarangini* I, 289Sqq.

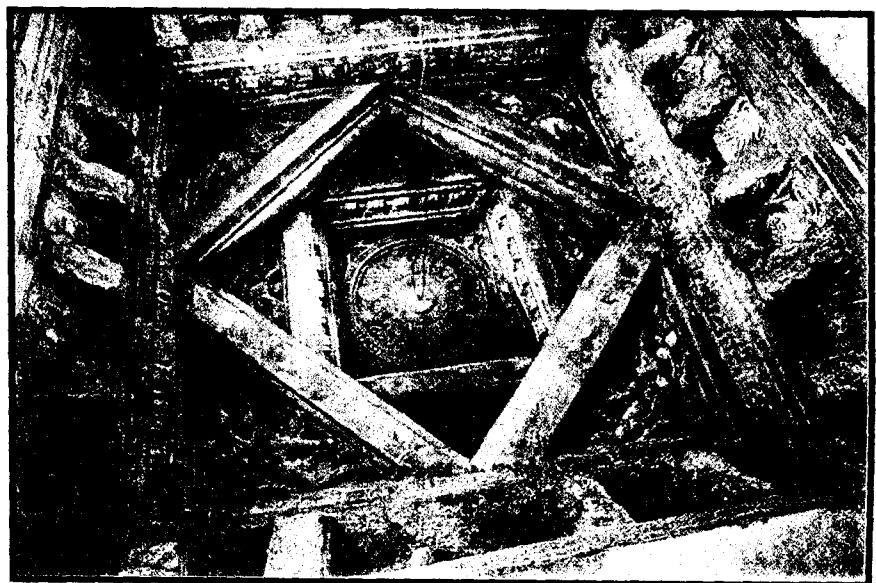
30 *Ibid*, 307.



Loduv Temple (*Courtesy Pratapaditya Pal*)



Pandrethan Temple
(*Courtesy Pratapaditya Pal*)



Pandrethan, Ceiling (*Courtesy Pratapaditya Pal*)

culture by constructing irrigation canals,³¹ building boat bridges,³² encouraging immigrations for their permanent settlements in the Valley³³ and giving priority to military exploits which resulted into the establishment of the first known Kashmir empire with its boundaries extended upto Kabul.³⁴

The Karkotas (620-855), who succeeded the Huns, are especially known for further expanding the empire which they inherited on account of its emergence as the mighty empire, Kashmir attracted the talent of the neighbouring world making it a great centre of hybrid civilization. Lalitaditya's prime minister was a Tukharian Buddhist, Cankun by name,³⁵ and the five high offices which were newly instituted by the king were manned by 'the S'ahis and other princes'.³⁶ The outstanding progress which Kashmir achieved on account of the influx of men of learning from the neighbouring world is evident from the world famous Martand and other great temples constructed by Lalitaditya which puzzle even the modern mind. The foreign styles which played a major role in the development of Kashmiri stone architecture filtered through West Asia.³⁷ Not only this but Kashmir owes to Iran for a very important architectural feature namely formation of intersecting cross- members best known as "lantern" ceiling, derived from wooden models introduced by the Parthians in the North-West.³⁸ Similarly writing about the origin of the variety of motifs carved on the pilasters of Avantiswamin temple built by Avantivarman (A.D 855-883), Robert E. Fisher says "Nearly all the pilasters are decorated with a rich variety of motifs, some native of India, others reflecting West Asian tastes, as found upon

31 Ibid, III, 318.

32 Ibid, 354.

33 Ibid, 307, 312-16.

34 Ibid, I, 294Sqq; III, 324Sqq.

35 Ibid, IV, 215, 246.

36 Ibid, IV, 142-43.

37 Robert E. Fisher, "Stone Temples" in Pratapaditya Pal (ed.) *Art and Architecture of Ancient Kashmir*, p. 29.

38 Ibid, p. 38.

Sassanian silver: roundels that enclose lotuses, geese, mythical creatures, paired humans, birds and flowers as well as numerous geometric patterns.”³⁹

Trade relations between Kashmir and Central Asia is sufficiently attested by the sources. We not only find Central Asian horse dealers in Kashmir⁴⁰ but even the Turkish slave girls were present in the seraglios of the Hindu rajas.⁴¹ Perhaps the main category of people, which dealt in Central Asian trade with Kashmir, was the jews. It is note worthy to hear from Al- Biruni that the Central Asian Jews were treated as a favoured group even during the times when for security reasons the Kashmiri rajas were reluctant to allow any non Hindu to enter the Valley⁴².

With the beginning of the 11th century Kashmir experienced a considerable influx of people from the Shahi Kingdom of Kabul. It should be mentioned that the Kashmiri rajas had matrimonial relations with Shahis of Kabul. It is, therefore, understandable to see the members of the Shahi family seeking refuge in Kashmir following Mahmud Ghaznavi’s conquest of Kabul.⁴³ The rajas of Kashmir appointed them to high positions.⁴⁴ Infact from the 11th century onwards it was the Loharas, Shahis and the immigrant Brahmanas from Gandhara, Kabul and Punjab who constituted the most influential ruling class pitted though they were with the hereditary land owning families of Kashmir and those Brahmanas who had long standing in the Valley.

Early contacts with the Perso-Islamic Culture

As per the extant evidence, Muslims, and with them Islam, started penetrating in Kashmir from 8th century. We know that a fugitive Arab

39 Ibid, p. 40.

40 *Rajatarangini*, VIII, 493.

41 Ibid, p. 520.

42 Al-Biruni, *Kitab-Al-Hind* (Eng. tr. Ecsachau) vol.I. p.206.

43 *Rajatarangini*, Vol. VII, vs. 103, 144-152, 178-274, 277.

44 Ibid.

commander and his corps received a territorial assignment from the Kashmiri raja⁴⁵. As the territory (Shalkabar, located in the Salt range) was situated on the borders of Kashmir, it would have served as a *caul de sack* for the Muslim adventurers and fortune seekers of the neighbouring territories.

In the 9th century A.D. Kashmir was thronged by the scholars belonging to different religions, and the Kashmiri Hindus and the Buddhists mingled with them.⁴⁶ Along with Christian and Jew priests and missionaries we also find the Muslim divines visiting Kashmir. At least we come to know of two great Muslim personalities of the time making a sojourn of Kashmir. They are Mansur al Hallaj,⁴⁷ the great mystic of Islam and Abu Sa'id Ghanim bin Qasim. The latter has also left an account which, besides showing that Kashmir was open to all religions in the 9th century, makes a mention of the debates held by the experts of different religions, each of which was perhaps making a powerful case for itself.⁴⁸ The religious texts on which the debates were held at that time were Thura (Torah), the Injil (Gospels) and the Zabur (Psalms). Since this information is contained in the account of a Muslim scholar who visited Kashmir, he perhaps recorded it on purpose: to attract the Muslim missionaries to take benefit of the free and frank environment of religious discourses in Kashmir. Hallaj, infact, was attracted by this scenario of Kashmir.⁴⁹

The Muslim immigrations into Kashmir and the contact of Kashmiris with the Muslims of the neighbouring world was disrupted for a brief period towards the beginning of the eleventh century, when the Turkish armies were swooping down on the bordering territories of Kashmir. For fear of Mahmud Ghaznavi's invasions, who made two abortive bids to conquer Kashmir, the rājās of Kashmir

45 *Chach-nama* (Eng. K.F.Mirza), p.160.

46 Vide. Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Hallaj* (Eng. tr. From the French by Herbert Masson, vol-I, entitled, *The Life of Al-Hallaj*, pp.178-180.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

fastened their doors and windows and did not allow any one to enter the Valley. Writing about this policy of Kashmiri rulers al-Birūni says, “in former times they used to allow one or two foreigners to enter their country, particularly the Jews, but at present they do not allow even a Hindu whom they did not know personally to enter, much less other people.”⁵⁰

However, this policy of sealing the borders was a temporary affair. When the permanent presence of the Muslim power on the borders of Kashmir became a ground reality, with the successive Muslim conquest of Hindu Śahi kingdom (whose territories extended from modern Afghanistan up to Punjab) and the petty principalities bordering the northern frontier of Kashmir, the Hindu rājās found no other alternative but to give concessions to pragmatism. With powerful Muslim kingdoms on its borders, any hostile policy against the Muslims was incongruous with the changing circumstances and, therefore, counter-productive. The Kashmiri rājās, therefore, revived their old policy – the policy of friendliness towards the Muslims. And pursuant to the new policy, they threw the borders of Kashmir open to adventurous and fortune-seeking Muslims. It is, therefore, not surprising that towards the end of the eleventh century we find an unprecedented increase in the influx of Muslims in Kashmir and consequently a sizeable Muslim population in the Valley.⁵¹ More interesting, however, is that we see the Muslims holding high positions in the state apparatus and that too in a sensitive wing of the government, namely, military. To top it all, their number was incredible. Thus there is profuse evidence of Muslim captains being in the army of Ananta (A.D. 1028-1063), Harsa (A.D. 1089-1101), Biksācara (A.D. 1120-21) and Jayasimha (A.D. 1128-1149)⁵² and that too in a large number. Kalhana talks of “Turuska captains of hundreds” in the army of Harsa. The number further increased with the passage of time when civil wars became rampant in Kashmir

50. Al-Biruni, *Kitāb-al-Hind* (Eng. tr. Ecsachau), vol. I, p.206.

51. *Rajatarangini*, vol. VII, vs. 885-87, 919-923, 1149, 2264.

52. Ibid.

and the Kashmiri rulers and the rival claimants to the throne became more and more dependent upon the support of the Muslims. That is why we find the Muslims forming an indispensable element of the army of the Hindu rājās of Kashmir; and this is why the rulers as well as the rival factions constantly sought and received the support of the neighbouring Muslim rulers.⁵³

The employment of ‘hundreds of Muslim captains’ in the armies of the Kashmiri kings at the turn of the eleventh century alludes to the presence of a sizeable Muslim population in Kashmir more than two hundred years before the establishment of the Muslim Sultanate. It is quite natural to presume that these Muslim captains would have either brought their families along with them or married local girls, both pointing to the presence of a larger Muslim population in Kashmir than is adumbrated in Kalhana’s *Rājataranginī*. As these Muslims belonged to a different religion and culture, it is tempting to infer that these settlers would have brought with them different professionals to cater to their daily needs.

While these early Muslim settlers may have settled down at various places in the Valley, they, however, seem to have taken up abode at a particular place in Srinagar, which came to be called as *Mlecch Mar* (the place of *mlecchas*) – the name obviously given to this habitation by the local population. Since this place was called *Mlecch Mar* for many centuries before the establishment of the Muslim Sultanate, it became its permanent place name although the Muslims ruled Kashmir for about five hundred years.

Apart from the fact that there were permanent Muslim settlements in Kashmir, there was also continuous movement of people between Kashmir and the Muslim-ruled neighbouring countries, particularly for trade purposes. It is important to mention that Central Asian horses were in considerable demand in Kashmir and this trade was mainly in the hands of Central Asian Muslims

53 Ibid,vs. 2762-64, 2782-84, 2843.

whom we find frequently visiting Kashmir.⁵⁴ Similarly, Kashmiri merchants greatly benefitted by trading in Central Asia and other neighbouring countries.⁵⁵

Given the fact that the Muslims who settled in Kashmir and with whom Kashmiris came into contact (both inside and outside the Valley) belonged to the upper echelons of an advanced society, the impact of Islam on Kashmiri Hindus and Buddhists, especially on the ruling elite and trading class, was a natural corollary. There is clear evidence that in the process of hob-nobbing with the neighbouring Muslim rulers some nobles were greatly assimilated into Islam.⁵⁶ True, they had political motives in identifying themselves with the Muslim culture. But more than that it was Islam's prestige as a superior culture and the prestige of a successful man's religion which drew them to it. It is, therefore, not surprising to find the fugitive nobles of Lavanya tribe eating "cow's meat in the lands of the *mlecchas*" where they had fled to escape from the wrath of Harsa (A.D. 1089-1111).⁵⁷ And it is also not difficult to understand Harsa remodelling the court etiquettes after the luxurious Iranian courts.⁵⁸

Ksemandra, the famous polymath of 11th century Kashmir makes a casual but intriguing mention of the presence of Muslim singers (*mleccha gayānah*) in Kashmir.⁵⁹ It is intriguing because the writer refers to the Muslim singers in the context of a courtesan who refuses to accept fee from her clients 'for fear of *mleccha gayānah* who wandered the streets.' These *mleccha* singers were in all probability the *manāqib khawāns* or *fadā'il khawāns*, who besides singing in praise of Allāh extolled the virtues of 'Ali (in case of being Shi'is) and the other companions of the Prophet (in case of being Sunnis) in the streets and bazaars of Iran and Central Asia as a propaganda technique to spread their belief and

54 *Rajatarangini*, VII, vs. 493.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*, vs. 1232

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*, 923-24.

59 *Vide.* Moti Chandra, *The world of Courtesans*, ch. "The Courtesans of Kashmir" p.184.

influence. The *manāqib khawāns*, it may be noted, existed in 'Iraq since the Būyid period (A.D. 932-1055). These *mleccha singers* of the Sanskrit scholar had gained so much prestige and influence because of their exemplary piety that the courtesans (who otherwise freely indulged in prostitution under the very nose of local religious *gurus* and state authorities) refused to entertain the clients at their sight.⁶⁰

The use of Sanskritized Persian technical terms like *divāra*, (*Pr. dabār*), *ganja* (*Pr. ganj*) and *ganjavāra*, (*Pr. gangwār*) by Kalhana⁶¹ (d. 1148-49) to whom everything non-Brāhmanic was abominable, unmistakably points to profound Islamic influence upon Kashmir owing to the considerable Muslim presence and the intimate relations between Kashmir and the neighbouring Muslim-ruled lands.

That by the beginning of the 13th century Muslims formed an important section of the Kashmiri population and that Islamic culture had made great strides is further borne out by a recently discovered copy of the Qur'ān written by one Fatha Allāh Kashmiri in A.D. 1237. It is written in such a fine style and form that according to Muhammad Yūsuf Teng, "it would have taken hundreds of years to the Kashmiri Muslims to attain such a proficiency in Arabic script."⁶² What is more significant about this copy of the Qur'ān is that it also contains a Persian translation. The Qur'ān with Persian translation, *interalia*, unmistakably proves the increasing presence of Muslim preachers and their activities in the Valley many centuries before the establishment of the Muslim Sultanate.

Significantly enough, of a very few facts, which Marco Polo chose worth recording about Kashmir, is the existence of a section of Muslims in Kashmir who worked as butchers for Kashmiri non-Muslims:⁶³

60 Muhammad Ashraf Wani, *Islam in Kashmir*, pp.51-52.

61 *Rajatarangini*, vol. IV, vs. 589, vol. V, vs.177, vol. VII, vs.125-26.

62 Vide. *Islam in Kashmir*, op.cit. p.52.

63 H.Yule, *Travels of Marco Polo*, I, p.167.

The people of the province [Kashmir] do not kill animals, nor spill blood, so if they want to eat meat they get the *saracenes* [Muslims] who dwell among them to play the butcher.

The streaming of Muslims into Kashmir continued unabated till the Muslim Sultanate was finally established in 1339. One among the lately arrived immigrants was Shāh Mīr, the future founder of the Muslim Sultanate in Kashmir. Coming from the royal family of Swāt, he and his tribe entered Kashmir around 1313 and was bestowed with a land grant and an important position in the administration by the then ruler, Suhadeva (1301-1320).⁶⁴

Since the Hindu rulers greatly depended upon the support of the Muslim commanders and the neighbouring Muslim rulers, Islam did not encounter a hostile political climate in Kashmir. This naturally encouraged the Muslim preachers, (who were watching intently for a favourable land to extend the frontiers of Islam) to enter the beautiful vale of Kashmir. As the Valley was quite favourably disposed towards Muslims especially from the mid eleventh century, it is little wonder, then, to find mention of Muslim saints in the Valley around the same time. However, for want of any contemporary record that would cuddle the Muslim preachers or consider the masses any force to reckon with, only the name of a Suhrawardī saint, Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn commonly known as Bulbul Shāh, has survived to us. All the Kashmiri sources as well as the modern works written on medieval Kashmir unanimously say that Sayyid Sharaf al-Din Bulbul Shah, the Suhrawardi sufi from Turkistan was the first Sufi to enter Kashmir. But this long held view is not tenable not only in view of the above mentioned evidence furnished by Ksemendra but also on the basis of the information provided by Turkish sources *Nesayimu'l- Mahabbe min Shemayimi'l- Futuvve*, by Ali Shir Namayi written in Oriental Turkish (Chaghatay) on Turkish darvishes, writes that

64 Jona Raja, *Rajatarangini*, tr. J.C.Dutt, p.15; *Baharistan-i Shahi*, fn. 46b.

a Yasawi darvish named Khawaja Baha al-Din, a grandson of Ismail Ata⁶⁵ (the later died in 1302), escaped from Central Asia by force and settled in Kashmir. There he gained fame and made many disciples among the inhabitants of the Valley.⁶⁶ “There is no indication” says Thierry Zarcone, whether Khawaja Baha al-Din belongs to the Naqshbandiyya or not; however, it is assisted that a Yasqwi-led Sufi movement evolved in this area.⁶⁷ And this movement decidedly began before 1301-1320 - the period in between which Sayyid Sharaf al-Din arrived in the Valley.

Sayyid Sharaf al-Din came to Kashmir during the reign of Suhadeva. His name was rescued from falling into oblivion by one of his most extraordinary achievements. He was instrumental in converting the reigning Buddhist ruler of Kashmir, Rinchana (A.D. 1320-1323) to Islam. And in order to pay tribute to his memory Rinchana (now Sadar al-Dīn) constructed a *khānaqāh* after his name and endowed it with a rent-free land grant. The *khānaqāh*, which is the first known *khānaqāh* of Kashmir, became so famous that the *muhalla*, where it was built came to be known as Bulbul Langar. Besides the *khānaqāh*, Sultān Sadar

65 Isma'il Ata was the major Khalifa of Sayyid Ata, himself second Khalifa of Hakim Ata who was Khalifa of Ahmad Yasawi; see *Koprulu Turk edebiyatında ilk mutasavvıflar*, p.378. Vide Thierry Zarcone, “Turkish Sufism in India; The Case of the Yasawiyya” in Francoise ‘Nalnl’ Delvoya, (ed.) *Cunfluence of Cultures: French Contributions to Indo-Persian Studies*, pp.87-88.

66 Ali Shir Nevayi, *Nesayimu 'l-Mahabbe min Shemayimi 7 Futuvve*, text edited in transcription by Kemal Eraslan, Doctoral Thesis, Istanbul, 1979. The paragraph concerning Khawaja Baha' al Din is the following: “Isma 'il Ataga nebirederud. Bu khanvdeda alardin 'alihimmetraq otmeydur. Dayim qush salmaqqa ve av avlamaqqa tabl u 'alem bile ishtigal korguzuler irmish. Zaman padshahi alarga ilnin iradet u hucumidin yaman iltip mulkdin ikhrac buyurupturlar. Kishmirga barip ol khalq alarga murid bolgandurlar” (p.385). See the commentaries of Fuat Koprulu on the biographies of the Yasawi dervishes contained in this book in “Orta-Asya turk dervishligi hakkinda notlar” (Notes regarding Turkish dervishes from Central Asia), *Turkiyat Mecmuasi*, 1965, XIV, pp.259-62. Vide, Thierry Zarcone, *Ibid*.

67 There is no indication whether he came directly from Turkestan or from Anatolia. The second hypothesis could be more accurate because of Muhammad al-Hindi's alleged Bektahi appurtenance and of his flight from Iran to the Ottoman empire. On the Bektashi order, see J.K. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, London, 1965. Vide Thierry Zarcone, *Ibid*.

al-Dīn also constructed a Jami‘ mosque in his newly built capital, Rinchanpura (Srinagar).⁶⁸

Considering that Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn came all the way from Turkistan trekking through the difficult and inhospitable mountainous terrain to propagate Islam in an alien and non-Muslim land, and also bearing in mind that he belonged to the institutional phase of Sūfism characterized by *pīr-murīd* relationship, it can be safely inferred that the Suhrawardī saint would have been accompanied by a big group of *murīds* (disciples) and *khudām* (ancillary staff) as was commonplace with every religious mission of the time.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ For details see *Islam in Kashmir*, op.cit., p.54.

⁶⁹ Ibid.